

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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1978-79 WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON FRAMEWORKS ISSUED

The waterfowl hunting regulations frameworks for the 1978-79 hunting season announced today by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are generally the same as last year, with the following exceptions:

--Requirement for Wednesday noon opening eliminated in the Atlantic Flyway. The option for a 50-day duck season with a Wednesday noon opening is replaced by a full 50 days without opening day restrictions.

--Lengthening of duck season in the Central and Mississippi Flyways. Due to improvement in the status of most breeding duck populations and anticipated better production in 1978 from prairie habitats, the season lengths are being increased from 45 to 50 days in the Mississippi Flyway and from 55 to 60 days in the Central Flyway's Low Plains Zone.

--Changes in point category in the Mississippi Flyway and Low Plains of Central Flyway where the "point system" is chosen. The mid-point category in the Mississippi Flyway, which includes mallard drakes, is being increased from 25 to 35 points to reduce the potential daily bag of mallards from four to three birds and indirectly reduce the harvest of female mallards. A similar change in the Low Plains portion of the Central Flyway increased the mid-point category from 20 to 25 points. Although the status of most ducks improved this year, the mallard breeding population declined for the second consecutive year and is below the population objective.

--Zoning in Alabama, Connecticut, North Carolina, and Nevada. Newly developed zoning proposals from Alabama, Connecticut, and North Carolina basically provide for a coastal zone and an inland zone. In Nevada, three zones are being established.

--Mexican-like ducks. The removal of Mexican ducks from the endangered species list restores the hybrid Mexican-like duck to the game bird category. Because they resemble female mallards, Mexican-like ducks are being assigned to the 70-point category in the point system limits that prevail in the High Plains portion of the Central Flyway. The daily bag limit will be two female mallards or two Mexican-like ducks or one of each in that small part of Arizona and the Pacific Flyway portions of New Mexico that use conventional regulations.

(more)

--Snow goose harvest restrictions in portions of Washington, Oregon, and California. Daily bag and possession limits on snow geese are reduced from three and six, respectively, to two and four in Washington; to one and one during the first part of the season (on or before November 9) in Lake and Klamath Counties of Oregon and in the Northeastern Zone of California; and to one and one during the last part of the season (on and after December 26) in California north of Interstate Highway 80. Washington will also have a reduced season that would not extend beyond January 1, 1979. The harvest restrictions are aimed at facilitating an increase in the snow goose populations at Wrangel Island, U.S.S.R., where breeding populations have declined from 120,000 birds in the early 1970's to 45,000 in 1978 because of poor weather, predation on breeding birds, and hunting pressure in the United States.

--More liberal snow goose season in Atlantic Flyway. The season length for snow geese in the Atlantic Flyway is being increased from 60 to 70 days, and the requirement that the snow goose season run concurrently with other waterfowl seasons was eliminated. The change is intended to help control population size and reduce damage to salt marshes and winter crops.

--Sandhill crane hunting in eastern Montana. The area in which sandhill crane hunting is permitted is being extended to the Central Flyway portion (approximately the eastern half) of Montana except Sheridan County (where a few whooping cranes have been observed at Medicine Lake National Wildlife Refuge) and the area south and west of Interstate 90 and the Big Horn River (to provide buffer protection for greater sandhill cranes breeding in Yellowstone Park). The Montana harvest is expected to remain below 100 birds.

--Canada geese. In general, Canada goose hunting regulations will be less restrictive this fall, with increased bag and possession limits in Back Bay, Virginia, and North Carolina and in Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, and Indiana. New Jersey south of the Atlantic City Expressway was added to the DelMarVa-southeastern Pennsylvania extended Canada goose season. Canada goose seasons are increased in Iowa and harvest quotas increased in the Lac Qui Parle Zone in Minnesota, the Swan Lake Zone in Missouri, and in Wisconsin and Illinois. A portion of eastern Arkansas formerly closed to Canada goose hunting is being reopened, but closures will be retained around three Canada goose concentration areas. The framework dates for Canada goose season in several locations in the Pacific Flyway were moved back from 1 to 20 days, although the season lengths remain unchanged.

--Other changes. Wigeon were shifted from the mid-point category to the low-point category in the three easterly flyways where the point system is offered; New York is being permitted to zone without season length restrictions and an option to split seasons will be offered in each zone.

The Service's final frameworks for migratory waterfowl hunting are being published in the September 1 Federal Register and will take effect upon publication. From these frameworks, State conservation agencies may select specific season dates and other options. The Service plans to publish the final waterfowl regulations in the Federal Register in late September. Leaflets summarizing the various regulations by Flyways will be made available at most Service offices at that time. Copies may be obtained by writing to: Publications Unit, Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.